

24 JEWISH CONTRIBUTION TO CIVILISATION

In mediaeval England, as is familiar to all who have read the literature of the period, the Jews were invariably, or almost invariably, money-lenders. But why? Because they were not admitted for any other purpose. Why, therefore, did they not leave? The answer is, that they were not allowed to; that they applied for permission to do so on more than one occasion, but were refused. The Crown, in fact, insisted on retaining them, so as to fleece them at incredibly frequent intervals for the benefit of the Exchequer, thus becoming the sleeping partner, and ultimate beneficiary, of all their transactions.

"No Jew may remain in England unless he do the King service," ran the opening words of a notorious Edict of Henry III of 1253, "and, from the hour of his birth, every Jew, whether male or female, shall serve Us in some way."

But the Jew (as has been indicated) was not the only usurer during the Middle Ages—though he was the only usurer of whom the Church did not ostensibly disapprove. Italians (known under the generic name of Lombards) and South French (generally called Cahorsins) had a particularly bad reputation for their remorseless activities in this direction: and, among the former, the Paduans were especially notorious, being singled out by Dante in his *Inferno* for condign punishment. The fact that the centre of the money market in London, to this day, is in " Lombard " Street, is an eloquent reminder of that period. Sometimes, pitiless usurious activities

were carried on in the shadow of the Papal
curia itself.
So remorseless were the Christian usurers
that St. Bernard
of Clairvaux called attention to the fact that
they far
outstripped the Jews. Similarly, when the
Jews were
expelled from France in 1306, the chroniclers
deplored
their departure, as it left the people in the
hands of much
less reasonable Christian competitors—for
example, the
notorious Gianfigliuzzi family, from Florence,
who lent